

To: Public Health Committee

Re: H.B. No. 5446 (3/12/10 Agenda Item #8)
S.B. No. 428 (3/12/10 Agenda Item #9)

Testimony of Eugene Chiappetta
President of The Durham Agricultural Fair Association, Inc.

I am the current president of the Durham Agricultural Fair Association, Inc. Our Association is a nonprofit organization, and has successfully organized and executed the annual Durham Fair for 93 years. Our Fair is a source of pride for its supporting communities, and for the hundreds of volunteers who come together every year to perpetuate the traditions of our agricultural heritage. Our Fair is also the largest source of revenue for most of the community nonprofit organizations who operate food booths and conduct other fund-raising activities as part of the Fair.

Though Connecticut's statutes concerning mass gatherings have existed since the early 1970's, the Durham Fair was not affected by these statutes until Public Act 09-232. The Durham Fair is already well-regulated and inspected by State and local authorities for a myriad of purposes, including ride safety, food safety, and building safety. We have always worked cooperatively and responsibly with the State Police, fire and emergency service providers, and local government. Agricultural fairs were not the impetus for the mass gathering statutes, and, with the safeguards incorporated in today's proposed amendments to 19a-443, the cooperation between our Fair, its supporting communities, and existing regulatory agencies will only continue to improve.

Our Fair, in cooperation with the Association of Connecticut Fairs, has worked closely with the Department of Public Health, local officials and our local legislative delegation to fashion an exception for agricultural fairs which will allow agricultural fairs to continue to operate, while creating higher standards for the safety planning process. Today's amendment is a responsible and effective measure.

The Durham Fair and its sister agricultural fairs around the state, 24 strong, support the Department's proposed amendment of Section 19a-443. We are a unique but fragile part of Connecticut's heritage, and without the consideration contained in this amendment our survival would be imperiled.

The Durham Fair is grateful for the Department's cooperation, for the assistance of Representative Lesser and Senator Meyer, and First Selectman Laura Francis, and for your patient consideration.


Eugene Chiappetta